Minister's speech at Roundup 07, January 29, 2007

Thank you. Good afternoon Mr. Premier, Grand Chief and Chief Councillors, and Elders. Welcome to British Columbia and to Vancouver. Bienvenue to the sunny west coast also - the traditional territory of the Coast Salish people.

It's our great pleasure to be hosting you here and my great pleasure to have received this kind invitation to participate in this forum on community support and how to get there.

But here we are embarking on a discussion that is very much at the forefront of what is taking place in terms of the economic life of our provinces in western and northern Canada. I wanted to first of all bring greetings from the Province of British Columbia and Premier Gordon Campbell, who sends his best wishes for the deliberations that are taking place here today. And I want to reinforce the message that we as a government are anxious to impart to one and all how thrilled we are about what's taking place in the mineral exploration sector. The continuation of that successful work is so very closely tied to the caucus, to who are here, and to what we are here to discuss today.

We are very happy about the fact that in our province some remarkable things are happening that are impacting directly on resource sector, including minerals and the energy sector. For a couple of years now a group of very adamant British Columbians, Grand Chief Ed John among them, came together with the Premier, representing the government. They began to ask the question: How do we bridge the historical gap that has separated Aboriginal people from the rest of society for so many years?

We have become all too familiar with the numbers around Aboriginal education, health, and mortality. How are we going to change that? How are we going to embark upon a new societal approach to ensure that all British Columbians and all Canadians share in the abundance of wealth that this country enjoys, comparatively speaking, around the world?

After a great deal of discussion some thoughts were committed to paper and that became the basis of what we here in British Columbia call the New Relationship. The New Relationship begins with a fairly straightforward, but very profound sentence - "We're all here to stay. "

If that is so, and I believe it is – how do we capitalize on that fact to our mutual benefit? I'm one of those people (and I will make this confession, though I have been involved in provincial public life for many, many years) who continuously thought about the Aboriginal issue. And I'm being generous with myself, because I must confess that for many years I thought about it this way: the Aboriginal and First Nations problem.

We don't think of it that way anymore – that's the change taking place increasingly in British Columbia. Now we think about the opportunity. We think about how we can work together to develop those economic opportunities. We think about how we can

capitalize on the wealth of resources within our jurisdiction. We think about how we can use those resources to close the gaps that have separated us, one from the other, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, for too long.

So my purpose here in bringing this welcome is not to embark on a lengthy dissertation around results that, I submit to you, speak for themselves. Your presence in this forum suggests to me that you do understand the benefits that will accrue if we continue to travel down this path.

The New Relationship Trust, a $100 million fund, was set up and transferred to a board where First Nations people will be making their own decisions about establishing priorities and economic development to close the gaps on the social side of the equation. They face a whole range of difficult issues, but ones they will address with passion and a firm belief that the obstacles and hurdles can be overcome with further opportunities. Here we have a forum designed to focus attention on some of the specific issues that have been at the root of huge, huge problems and injustices – but it is very forward looking. It is all about how we move forward together to get results.

Reconciliation: saying it doesn't make it a fact. It becomes a fact over time. It becomes a fact when you can sign agreements with the Songhees and the Esquimalt First Nations to begin the process to resolve issues around ownership of lands and institutions – no less than the BC Legislature itself. It's a series of steps and just like that, you are involved in a business that is highly competitive on a world-wide basis. You require the certainty that is essential from a planning point of view. You establish these things one step at a time.

Ten years ago we would not have had this. Ten years ago we would not have gathered here with such an eminent wealth of experience, but today we all understand the benefits that are possible. We understand how our country and the various jurisdictions within this country will be a better place because of it.

So, on behalf of the government of British Columbia, I applaud each of you for making a commitment to be here at Roundup 07 and this at particular gathering. I applaud you for considering the various aspects of securing community support needed to embark upon projects involving the use of the resource and the land that belongs to all of us. And I dare say that years from now people will look back upon this – on what has taken place in British Columbia. They will talk about the creation of a Leadership Council with representation from the Aboriginal organizations that exist within British Columbia. Grand Chief Ed John and Chief Judith Sayers are here today. They are instrumental to this process; so are Regional Chief Shawn Atleo and Grand Chief Stewart Phillip.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are speaking with one another. We are finding those solutions. We are at last recognizing what might have seemed so obvious: We are all here to stay.

When we work together and discuss matters in forums like this one, sponsored today by Roundup 07, then we're all destined to profit greatly.

I wish you well in the deliberations that will take place during this conference. I am appreciative of the invitation to be here and participate with you. I'm honoured to be at this podium with the esteemed leaders and people we have here today.

Good luck to one and all!